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15 May 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President
The White House

SUBJECT : Report on the Strategic Threat by the
President's Foreign Intelligence
Advisory Board

1. Admiral Anderson has made available to me a copy of his letter to you dated April 30, 1974, containing PFIAB's annual assessment of the strategic threat. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the Board's recommendations about US strategic policy and the public presentation of it, or about the priority which should be accorded to certain US R&D programs. I would, however, like to comment on three other aspects of the Board's conclusions--the prospects for Soviet strategic superiority, intelligence requirements to support US strategic policy, and the uncertainties in intelligence estimates.

2. In the estimate of "Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Attack" (NIE 11-8-73) which I submitted to you with the concurrence of the United States Intelligence Board in January of this year, a distinction was drawn between two different aspects of strategic power. One

involves equality or superiority in quantitative terms. The second considers deterrent and war-fighting capabilities. The message of NIE 11-8-73 is that:

--The US faces very substantial improvements in the USSR's strategic attack forces.

--These improvements will convey an image of superiority to those who ascribe significance to quantitative measures.

--Although these improvements will increase Soviet counterforce capabilities--notably against the US Minuteman force--they will not negate the US deterrent under any circumstances we can foresee over the next ten years.

The judgments in the NIE assumed no change in US forces beyond what is now programmed and assumed no SALT constraints other than those of the existing agreements.

In the case of one illustrative force projection, Soviet abrogation of the Interim Agreement was assumed.

3. The SALT agreements placed a ceiling on certain largely quantitative aspects of the growth of the strategic forces of the two sides. The qualitative improvement of strategic forces, unconstrained by SALT I, has proceeded unabated. This is an area in which the US

still has a substantial lead. I believe that Soviet actions since the signing of the SALT agreements reflect, not only an attempt to catch up with the US competition, but also an opportunistic desire to achieve a margin of superiority if they can. In my view, the Soviets perceive themselves as essentially equal in overall strategic power today. However, I do not believe (as does the PFIAB) that the Soviets perceive themselves as able to obtain a militarily meaningful overall superiority in strategic power during the next ten years. How far they will press any attempt to achieve superiority will depend to a considerable degree on US negotiating and defense policies--in particular on our ability to persuade them that:

- they cannot both substantially improve their strategic capabilities and have the benefits of detente,
- non-restraint on their part will produce offsetting US reactions,
- ~~that~~ restraint on their part will be reciprocated.

4. In judging the impact of Soviet strategic developments on the credibility of the US deterrent, we stated in NIE 11-8-73 that we did not foresee any circumstances in the next ten years in which the Soviets are

likely to develop the ability to reduce damage to themselves to acceptable levels by a first strike against US strategic forces--the Soviets would have to calculate that the US would be able to make a devastating reply to any Soviet surprise attack. In reaching these conclusions in the NIE and in my reexamination of them, I have considered possible damage levels on the two sides as revealed by engagement analyses between US and Soviet strategic forces. There are obvious uncertainties in such analyses; but in reaching my judgment I have taken account of expected continuing weaknesses in the capabilities of Soviet air defenses to prevent the penetration of bombers, the low levels to which Soviet ABM defenses are limited by Treaty, and the great difficulties the Soviets face in the development of effective ASW capabilities against missile submarines in the open oceans. Considering past Soviet achievements, the present status of R&D efforts, and their estimated potential for technological advances, I do not foresee the development of Soviet capabilities of the magnitude and quality necessary to negate the US deterrent in the next ten years.

5. I agree fully with PFIAB's concern over the need to improve the substantive intelligence required to support US policy objectives, especially in areas

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of significant Soviet R&D effort or potential. In the three critical areas the Board mentioned--accuracies of Soviet missiles, prospects for detection of US missile submarines and the strategic implications of Soviet laser developments--we currently have intensive interagency study efforts underway in order to provide policy officials with a definitive as possible an understanding of Soviet programs and capabilities. These three subjects are listed among the Key Intelligence Questions toward which I have directed the entire intelligence community to focus its attention.

6. I appreciate and will pursue the Board's suggestion that both CIA and DIA participate in the preparation of the "RISOP" (Red Integrated Strategic Operations Plan) used in wargaming the SIOP. As the gaming becomes more complex with more SIOP options, CIA may be able to contribute more than hitherto to development of the RISOP. I will undertake to explore with the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff how CIA can best contribute to this aspect of operational planning for our strategic forces.

7. Finally, I agree with the PFIAB findings that intelligence estimates require the keenest possible technical evaluations. To that end we are experimenting on ways to communicate more precisely the degree of

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confidence we have in our judgments, particularly on technical data. One of our interagency studies is addressing the prospects for determining the accuracies of Soviet ICBMs in the period about five years from now, in an effort to narrow the uncertainties as well as to alert users of intelligence to them. The strategic relationship over the next decade is likely to be increasingly sensitive to uncertainties in such qualitative factors as missile accuracies, which are more difficult to measure than quantitative elements such as the numbers of launchers or weapons. (Sentence deleted.)

W. E. Colby